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ABSTRACT

Recent attempts to clear up the controversy over when and why receipt of an intimate self-disclosure leads to attraction in a first encounter have called attention to the possible role of the perceiver's own disclosure. To investigate the influence of the perceiver's own disclosure on attraction to a disclosing stimulus person, female subjects (N=48) selected two topics and disclosed information on them to a confederate stimulus person. This disclosure was manipulated to occur either before or after the videotaped confederate selected and disclosed three topics that were either low or high in intimacy. Attraction was assessed by means of a three-item summed liking index and a six-item summed impressions index. Results indicate that impressions of the confederate were more positive when the confederate disclosed first and when she disclosed intimately. The perceiver's own disclosure was correlated with attraction to the confederate when the perceiver disclosed before her partner, but not when she disclosed after. (Author)

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SELF-DISCLOSURE AND ATTRACTION:
A Self-Perception Analysis

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Self-Disclosure and Attraction: A Self-Perception Analysis

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In a recent attempt to clear up the controversy over when and why receipt of an intimate self-disclosure leads to attraction in a first encounter, Archer, Berg, and Runge (in press) have called attention to the possible role of the perceiver's own disclosure. Interestingly enough, almost all the studies with actual participants as subjects that do find a relationship between disclosure and attraction either (1) include a "get-acquainted" interaction as a preliminary (Certner, 1973; Jones & Archer, 1976; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969) or (2) insure that the perceiver's disclosure precedes the stimulus person's (Archer et al., in press; Gould, Brounstein, & Taylor, Note 1). Archer et al. maintain that in situations such as these the perceiver, by providing some initial information about him- or herself, has established a basis for interpreting the later remarks of the stimulus person as self-relevant. Thus, in studies in which the stimulus person's disclosure comes from "out of the blue" before the perceiver reveals anything (e.g., Archer & Berg, 1978; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971; Derlega, Walmer, & Furman, 1973) it is hardly surprising that little or no relationship with attraction was found. Intimate disclosure from another can be interpreted as affiliation and superficial disclosure as rejection only within a context. But no previous experiments have tested this hypothesis. Therefore, in the present experiment the order of a subject's disclosure was manipulated to take place either before or after the (videotaped) disclosure of a confederate whose revelations were either of high

or low intimacy.

Another related issue is whether the intimacy of the perceiver's own disclosure bears any relationship to attraction for the stimulus person. Chaikin and Derlega (1974) have drawn upon Bem's (1970) self-perception theory to suggest that "...persons who voluntarily disclose intimate information about themselves may infer that they like the target because of these revelations" (p. 27). Archer et al. manipulated the intimacy of subjects' own disclosures, but found no effects on attraction to the stimulus person. However, these investigators invalidated their study as a test of the self-perception hypothesis by assigning levels of intimacy and supplying subjects with a sufficient explanation for their disclosure (i.e., the requirements of the research design). In the present study intimacy was not manipulated: subjects were allowed to choose a topic from a list ranging widely in intimacy. The correlations between their perceptions of their own intimacy and their expressed attraction for the confederate provided the means to test the hypothesis. The self-perception hypothesis would predict a positive correlation between own intimacy and attraction for the other when the order is such that the perceiver discloses before the confederate. In this condition no salient cue to explain away intimacy is present. On the other hand, when the order is such that the perceiver discloses after the confederate no correlation was expected. In this condition a reciprocity effect should occur and perceivers should simply attribute their (matching) level of intimacy to the confederate's.

METHOD

Subjects

Forty-eight female undergraduates from the introductory courses at

the University of Texas at Austin participated as subjects. They were assigned equally in random blocks to one of the four conditions of the 2 (Order of disclosure) x 2 (Confederate intimacy) design.

Procedure

In a procedure based on Archer et al. the experiment was explained to subject dyads as an investigation of the acquaintanceship process. They were told that they would take turns describing themselves to their partner. The second subject in the dyad was in reality a confederate. The experimenter introduced them and showed them to separate rooms.

Communication between them was supposedly achieved through matching T.V. cameras and microphones. The subject and her confederate partner were to see and hear each other on video monitors, an elaborate set-up ostensibly required for audio-visual recording purposes.

They were told that each would receive a different topic list to serve as a guideline for their descriptions. Subjects were told that their assigned order of disclosure (either before or after their confederate partner) was purely the result of a chance selection process.

The subject's topic list consisted of 14 topics modified from the Taylor and Altman (1966) intimacy-scaled stimuli ranging in value from 1.82 to 8.58. She was given a couple of minutes to study the list and select two of them on which to base her presentation to her partner. It was said that her partner would be given a copy of the subject's list to refer to during her description. Then each subject described herself on her chosen topics to the confederate who was supposedly watching from the next room.

Either before or after the subject's own description, she watched the confederate describe herself on three topics. These topics were said

to have come from a 20-topic list made available to the subject during the confederate's description. This list was also modified from the Taylor and Altman stimuli and ranged in intimacy from 2.00 to 10.25. Although similar in content to the topics on the subject's list, none were repeats. The difference in lists and topics was attributed to desire to simulate the differential contributions that typically occur in conversations.

What the subject actually saw was a videotape in which the confederate disclosed at either a low or high level of confederate intimacy. These videotapes were the same ones used by Archer et al. In the low intimacy tape the confederate first discussed her liking for country music, then described her positive reaction to President Carter's human rights and energy positions, and finally revealed her future plans to become a nurse. In the high intimacy tape she began with her relationship with a friend, then revealed how her feelings had been hurt by the actions of her alcoholic brother, and concluded by confiding her fear of failure in college.

Dependent Measures

Subjects rated the intimacy of their own self-description and the intimacy of the confederate's self-description on separate 10-point scales immediately after each took place. Attraction was assessed at the end of the experiment by means of a three-item summed liking index and a six-item summed impressions index. The liking items asked subjects how much they liked their partner, would like to get to know her better, and would like to have her as a close friend. The impressions items asked subjects to rate their partner in terms of adjective pairs (immature-mature, phony-genuine, maladjusted-well adjusted, insensitive-sensitive, closed-open, and cold-warm). All the attraction items were in the form of 10-point scales.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intimacy

The analysis of variance on the subjects' ratings of the confederate's intimacy yielded only the intended main effect of confederate intimacy, F (1, 44) = 62.69, $p < .001$. Regardless of the order of disclosure in the dyad, subjects who saw the high intimacy tape rated the description higher in intimacy (8.96) than subjects who saw the low intimacy tape (4.92).

Differences in subjects' ratings of their own intimacy were expected to parallel the low and high intimacy confederate, but obviously only when the subject's disclosure followed the confederate's (i.e., a reciprocity effect). However, the analysis of these ratings showed no hint of an interaction ($F < 1$), only a main effect of order, F (1, 43) = 6.85, $p < .02$. Regardless of the confederate's intimacy, when subjects disclosed after she did their ratings of their own intimacy were higher (6.83) than when they disclosed before she did (5.08). Apparently, even in the low confederate intimacy condition subjects were influenced to disclose more intimately by the greater number of topics assigned to the confederate (3 vs. 2).

Attraction

An interaction was predicted between the order of disclosure and confederate intimacy variables on the attraction measures. However, the analysis of the liking index revealed only the hint of an interaction F (1, 44) = 2.13, $p < .16$. Furthermore, as may be seen from the means in Table 1, this weak trend was contrary to the prediction. It was produced by somewhat greater liking for the high intimacy than for the low intimacy confederate when the subject disclosed after she did, rather than before.

No order by intimacy interaction was found in the analysis of the impressions index either ($F < 1$), but both the order main effect, F (1, 44) = 5.56, $p < .03$, and the confederate intimacy main effect, F (1, 44) = 12.91, $p < .001$ were significant. Table 1 means indicate that regardless of the confederate's intimacy, more positive impressions of her were reported by subjects who disclosed after she did. In addition, regardless of the order of disclosure, subjects' impressions of the highly intimate confederate were more positive.

The results from the attraction measures are clearly in conflict with the order of disclosure hypothesis based on the reasoning of Archer et al. The impressions data might be interpreted as evidence that previous disclosure leads the perceiver to be more critical of the stimulus person's response. But, there is no indication from our data that high and low intimacy on the part of the stimulus person produces greater differences in attraction when it follows disclosure by the perceiver.

The intimacy-attraction relationship

The second hypothesis put forth in this experiment was a correlational one. Based upon self-perception theory a positive relationship was expected between the subject's perception of the intimacy of her own self-description and her attraction to confederate. But this relationship was expected only in the condition in which her disclosure preceded the confederate's. Table 2 displays the correlations between own intimacy and the liking and impressions indices by order condition. In accordance with the hypothesis, significant positive correlations were found when subjects disclosed before the confederate ($p < .008$ for liking, $p < .02$ for impressions) but not when they disclosed after her. This difference between the correlations in the

order of disclosure conditions reached significance for liking (z = 1.77, p = .04, one-tailed), but not for impressions (z = 1.20, p = .12, one-tailed).

Apparently, subjects who disclosed before the confederate, out of the blue and with no real knowledge of her, used their own disclosure intimacy to infer attraction. On the other hand, subjects who disclosed after the confederate, in response to her description, did not use their own disclosure intimacy as a basis for inference.

In conclusion, two hypotheses were tested in this study concerning the role of the perceiver's own disclosure as an influence on attraction for a disclosing stimulus person. The experimental first hypothesis suggested by Archer et al. held that only when the perceiver reveals first, would the disclosure of the stimulus person be perceived as evaluative and hence affect attraction. Although order of disclosure in the dyad did influence attraction and the preference for a highly disclosing stimulus person found by Archer et al. was replicated, there was no predicted interaction effect. As on so many previous occasions, investigators of disclosure will be forced to continue their search for a suitable explanation for the higher attraction sometimes expressed for an intimate stimulus person.

The correlational second hypothesis suggested by Chaikin and Derlega that predicted a relationship between the perceiver's intimacy and attraction for the stimulus person when the perceiver disclosed first fared much better. When the perceiver's disclosure took place under circumstances in which explanatory cues were weak, intimacy was correlated with attraction. Investigators of disclosure would be well advised to consider the operation of a self-perception process and examine it more closely in future attraction studies.

Reference Note

1. Gould, R., Brounstein, P., & Taylor, D. A re-examination of personalistic disclosure. Presented at a symposium entitled "Self-disclosure and responsivity: An attribution and self-perception analysis" (D. A. Taylor, chair) at the 86th convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, 1978.

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Table 1

Mean Ratings of the Confederate on Attraction Indices

	Before		After	
	Low intimacy confederate	High intimacy confederate	Low intimacy confederate	High intimacy confederate
Liking	21.08	21.08	20.58	23.92
Impressions	42.83	50.92	48.67	53.67

Note: n = 12.

Table 2

Correlations Between Perceiver's Disclosure Intimacy and Indices of Attraction to the Confederate

	Before	After
Liking	.49	-.01
Impressions	.53	.22

Note: n = 24.